

News and Updates from SCDSS - October 2021

State Director's Angle
Reflecting and Pushing Forward

By State Director Michael Leach

As we mark the start of Fall and head into the last couple months of 2021 and the start of 2022, we are often moved to reflect on what we have accomplished personally or professionally. It typically is filled with wrapping up projects while wrapping presents, planning strategic initiatives for the coming year while planning family celebrations, and reflecting on personal accomplishments while analyzing outcomes. As I have stated in previous messages, 2021 has been another challenging year with unforeseen changes to work and home lives. It has also been a year of learning for all of us, both at the individual and team level. I know these past 18 months have made balancing personal life and professional life some of the most stressful in my life. It has been hard to keep going along with business as usual while dealing with feelings of “pandemic fatigue” and the effects on our motivation, mental health, and energy.



Truthfully, the adversity we have all experienced over the past year and a half has brought us closer and, throughout all of that, we have seen incredibly positive impacts on those we serve. I have heard stories of case managers who went above and beyond to foster a pet so a child entering foster care did not have to be

separated from their pup. I have heard stories of connecting with communities to make sure our clients have shoes, book bags, and school supplies. I've heard stories of teams going above and beyond to help lighten the load of neighboring counties, regions and program areas – and managers developing creative solutions to make sure, whatever the need, that every need was met and every individual and family cared for.

Collectively with our partners, we have kept child care centers in business and made sure that parents have a safe place to send their children as they return to work. We have reunified families and provided services and supports to people at their most dire time of need. We have helped adults stay in their homes, helped feed families during the pandemic, and have made sure that people feel safe, cared for, and connected throughout this crazy time.

We are incredibly proud of all we have accomplished with our valued clients and partners this year. And now is not the time to give in to fatigue, nor to give up. I promise to keep pushing our DSS family to come together and discover and implement new and innovative ways to help our clients and partners rapidly react to the changing nature of business and the client experience. Already, listening to the needs of clients and partners has helped us to develop new technologies, customer service portals, and ways to provide assistance and supports more timely and efficiently.

We are working to become more of a learning organization and we have learned a great deal over the past year – about DSS, about the needs of the families we serve, about our partners and community, and about ourselves. We are stronger today, and we will be strong in the future. We are stronger today; we will be strong in the future, and I am honored to stand alongside you in this calling. **We are #BetterTogether!**

ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Early Care & Education | Employment
Services



Making Childcare More Affordable for South Carolina Families
Rate Changes Impact Reimbursement Rates in the State

SCDSS is taking additional steps to assist parents as they balance work and child care. Starting October 1, 2021, SCDSS' Division of Early Care and Education implemented a new reimbursement rate structure for payments issued to child care providers participating in ABC Quality and accepting SC Voucher recipients. Overall, that means increases in the maximum amount providers are reimbursed. The new structure is based on the individual age of the child as opposed to a grouping of ages. Read more [here](#).

The rate restructure is not automatic and requires providers to apply for a rate increase. For more information, please call the SC Voucher Program at 1-800-262-4416.



Support Available for Parents and Child Care Providers

The SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education continues to offer financial assistance for child care for working families that have income at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. Information and an application for parents can be found on www.scchildcare.org under News and Announcements.

Exciting Updates in Early Care and Education

By Michele Bowers, Division of Early Care & Education Director and Sherrie Dueno, ABC Quality Outreach Coordinator

The South Carolina Department of Social Services, Division of Early Care and Education is in the fifth round of issuing COVID Support Child Care Operating Grants to help child care providers that have had to close or have lost revenue due to low enrollments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This grant opportunity is available to assist licensed or registered child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care home providers in paying for their child care facility expenses, including rent/mortgage payments, utility bills, cleaning or sanitation costs, and personnel costs which may include salary increases, retention bonuses, etc. Since May 2020, the agency has expended \$181,293,000 in these child care provider grants. For more information on the grants, please visit [here](#).

Here is some more exciting news. More than 360 early childhood educators employed at participating ABC Quality early childhood programs received professional development scholarships to attend the South Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children (SCAEYC) conference. Scholarship recipients can use this training to meet Child Care Licensing training requirements, ABC Quality standards and increase the overall quality of care at their early childhood programs. To learn more about ABC Quality click [here](#).





Emergency Allotments (Supplements) for Existing SNAP Households

Effective August 1, 2021, the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) announced the continuation of the federally-approved Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) emergency allotments (supplements) to all South Carolina SNAP households.

Since March 2020, the assignment of emergency SNAP allotments (supplements) has brought all authorized households up to the maximum benefit allotment, based on household size, regardless of income.

All program rules, including verification of income, are not waived due to this emergency supplement process.

As DSS receives monthly, federal approval, eligible SNAP recipients will receive their monthly benefit on their normal schedule at the regular allotment amount. The emergency supplement will be issued separately and may show up on a SNAP household's EBT card within 48 hours after their regular allotment amount.

[Apply for SNAP online.](#)

ATTENTION JOB SEEKERS

Who Receive SNAP or TANF...

Each year DSS helps find jobs for thousands of recipients of **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits. Research shows that children are more likely to escape a life of poverty if their parents enter the workforce.

DSS is committed to continuing to help people in South Carolina find employment quickly and to develop the skills necessary to obtain careers in fields where jobs are available and in demand.

If you are, or know of, a recipient of either SNAP or TANF benefits who needs assistance finding employment, click on the buttons below for resources and assistance.

[Employment
Services Contact Form](#)

[Job Fair Announcements &
Employment Tools](#)

DSS Helps SC Employers Build a Quality Workforce

The [SCDSS Division of Employment Services](#) works to support business owners who hire **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program participants entering the workforce. When you hire our customers, you become eligible for a variety of benefits, incentives and supports designed to meet your specific needs. Hiring through DSS Employment Services programs provides businesses and new employees a promising future. We assist with:

- Tax credit opportunities for employers
- Workforce Consultants statewide
- Vocational assessments
- Pre-screened job referrals
- Background screening
- Ongoing assistance

Click here to view a [video](#) about how our partnership with Homes of Hope in Greenville, SC is changing lives!



CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



SCDSS Child Welfare Services has adopted the theme **Better Together: Enhancing Practice, Transforming Lives** to reflect our commitment to achieve best outcomes for the children, youth and families we serve. This means working **hand-in-hand** with families, supported by a statewide network of service providers, judicial and education partners, foster parents, the faith community and so many others who are dedicated to helping families thrive.

Here's a recent testimony from a Child Welfare Services professional about how this commitment is making a difference...

Building Better Practice Through Partnership

"I've learned that DSS should not be working alone when working with families. First, it is important to engage families (paternal and maternal families) at the beginning of our work. Secondly, our community partners are a valuable resource to our parents as well as the agency. Therefore, our continuous communication and

relationship with our community partners are very important, and teaming will allow us to work in the best interest of the children and families.”

#BetterTogether

October: Safe Sleep Awareness Month



4 TIPS
FOR PARENTS AND
CAREGIVERS TO HELP
BABY SLEEP SAFELY

- 

Place your baby on his or her back for all sleep times - naps and at night.
- 

Use a firm sleep surface, such as a mattress in a safety-approved crib.
- 

Keep soft bedding such as blankets, pillows, bumper pads, and soft toys out of baby's sleep area.
- 

Have baby share your room, not your bed.

3
SOURCES: Pediatrics, October 2016; Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

All month long, DSS has observed Safe Sleep and SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) Awareness Month. According to statistics from the CDC, around 3,500 sleep-related deaths among infants are reported each year in the United States. That number includes those deaths from SIDS, accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed, and unknown causes.

Experts say parents should follow the ABCs of safe sleep: **A**lone, **B**ack, and **C**rib or bassinet. Babies should sleep alone in a crib, bassinet, or playpen with a firm, flat mattress, and a tightly-fitting sheet. Babies should be put to sleep on their back because that is considered the safest position for an infant throughout their first year. Use a firm sleep surface such as a crib, bassinet, or a portable crib that meets safety standards, along with a tight-fitting, firm mattress and fitted sheet.

If you are a new parent or know someone who is, please consider the additional tips shown in this accompanying graphic. And for

more information on Safe Sleep Awareness Month, visit [here](#).

Attention Kinship Caregivers!

**Are you raising the child of a
relative or friend?**

**As a kinship caregiver, you are
invited to a FREE event just for you!**

Kinship Caregiver Conference!



**Charleston Marriott
Charleston, SC**



**Saturday,
October 30, 2021
8:00AM-5:00PM**

Featuring



Dr. Gerald Smalls, Esq.

Raised by his grandmother in South Carolina, he is the Chair and Associate Professor of Law and Accounting of the Johnson College of Business and Economics at USC Upstate.

This Event Includes:

Free Breakfast and Lunch!

Breakout Sessions

- Family Communication
- Self-Care
- Parenting children who have experienced trauma
- Legal and custody issues

**Community Resources,
Door Prizes and more!**

*This event is for kinship caregivers only
Childcare will not be provided.



Space is limited.

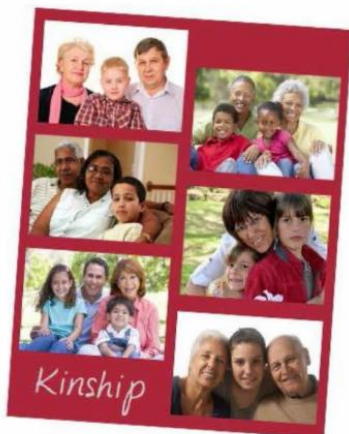
Register Today!

**Call Toll-Free:
854-444-3716**

*Proof of COVID vaccination or a
negative COVID test within 72 hours
will be required to attend this event

Caring for Our Own

Join us for an informational and fun training designed specifically for kinship families like yours!



Outcomes for Caring for Our Own

Children living with kinship caregivers will have their immediate and ongoing needs safety, permanency and well-being met.

Kinship caregivers will help children achieve legal permanency in the shortest time frame possible.

Kinship caregivers will build and maintain collaborative relationships that support meeting the child's emotional, educational and physical development.

Older adolescents will receive the educational and vocational services they need in order to achieve self-sufficiency.

Kinship caregivers will have an ongoing, informal social support network made up of other kinship caregivers.

This meeting was very informative.

I enjoyed the sharing and discussions.

It was great to hear from other caregivers in my same position and get their thoughts.

I was glad to learn more about DSS and what the different worker's roles are.

Upcoming Sessions

November 4 & 11 (9am – 12pm)

November 2, 9, & 16 (6pm – 8pm)

December 2 & 9 (9am – 12pm)

December 7 & 14 (9am – 12pm)

To register email kayla.crim@dss.sc.gov or sckinshipcare@dss.sc.gov with your full name, mailing address, email address and telephone number.

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES



CHILD SUPPORT Customer Service Portal



A secure way for parents to access important information about their case. Parents will have access to view:

- Payment information
- Hearing dates
- Enforcement measures in place
- Announcements affecting their case

The Customer Service Portal can be used to update:

- Address, phone, email
- Employment information

To access the portal, you will need to create a unique **USER ID** and **PASSWORD**.

To get started, call 1-800-768-5858



clientportal.dss.sc.gov



Child Support Services Update

By Tim Mose, Child Support Services Division Director

The Child Support Services Division (CSSD) has been focused more than ever on improving the customer experience. One way CSSD is accomplishing this is through our [Customer Services Portal](#). In mid-September, the portal had nearly 17,000 subscribers with more than 22,000 cases among them. The portal is available to both custodial and noncustodial parents and the feedback received from all

parties has been overwhelmingly positive. Future improvements to the portal are planned including improved service when using mobile devices.

Other customer service improvements undertaken by the Child Support program include the availability of **virtual kiosks** in all our Regional Child Support offices. The virtual setting is a comfort and convenience to both staff and customers. Walk in constituents still needing help can still speak with CSSD staff face-to-face in these regional offices.

A natural complement to the portal will be an online child support application, which will afford subscribers the convenience of applying for services 24/7. The new online child support application will only be an application for services provided by CCSD through the federal Title IV-D program, and will not apply to private, non-IV-D child support cases. Of note is that an increasing number of the state's child support cases are IV-D. In fact, as of the end of the 2020 calendar year, 83.4% of all cases in SC were handled by our Division. That's an increase of nearly 10% from just a couple of years ago.

We expect the online application to be available to the public during the first half of 2022 and are continually committed to future innovations that enhance our service to SC children and families.

DSS Child Support Customer Service Portal

(Click the button above to access portal now.)

***A secure way for parents to access
important child support case information
any time, any day.***

Whether paying or receiving support, parents can create a unique user ID and password to view payment information, hearing dates, enforcement measures in place, and receive occasional announcements affecting their case. The portal can also be used to update address, phone number, employment and email information.

ADULT ADVOCACY

Adult Protective Services | Domestic Violence Prevention
Protection. Respect. Independence.





Domestic Violence Prevention Month

Nationwide, millions of children are exposed to domestic violence each year. Domestic violence impacts every community and is preventable.

October: Domestic Violence Prevention Month

Time to speak up about DV and support survivors!

Domestic violence is present in every community, across all demographics. The effects of abuse suffered can be both physical and mental and can last a lifetime. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. In one year, that equals more than 10 million people. To learn more about making a difference, click [here](#).



Click here to visit our website to learn more about Adult Protective Services



APS presented with Elder Abuse Day Proclamation

On October 1st, DSS State Director Michael Leach made a special presentation to the [SCDSS Adult Advocacy Division](#). He presented a framed copy of S.425m legislation protects vulnerable adults from fraudulent financial transactions. Director Leach also presented was a framed Proclamation from Governor Henry McMaster on Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which was observed on June 15th.

Widening Pathways for Improved Outcomes

DSS was a proud organizer of a recent conference aimed at understanding violence against people with disabilities and ways to provide victims with needed services. Studies show people with disabilities are three times more likely to experience violent victimization. At the online “Widening Pathways: Improving Access to Services for Survivors with Disabilities” conference on September 23rd and 24th, attendees heard personal stories from survivors and learned about barriers faced by people with disabilities.

Kelly Cordell, DSS Director of Adult Advocacy, spoke on the differences between a vulnerable adult and a person with a disability, and the legal responsibilities before an individual can be considered vulnerable. Michael Leach, DSS State Director, also spoke to attendees as he championed a collaborative approach to disability justice.

The overall goal of the conference was to provide information and discussion opportunities on involving individuals with disabilities more directly in the assessment of service needs and care standards. Attendees ended the conference with the knowledge of how to ensure services are accessible and address disability justice principles including intersectionality, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, leadership of those most impacted, centeredness in community support and intervention, and commitment to cross-movement organizing.



SCDSS Highlights



2021 OCTOBER EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Congratulations!



DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Row 1: Andrena Rice, Economic Services Division, Greenville; Brandi Nerud, Adult Advocacy Services Division, State Office; Jennifer Fenters, Legal Services Division, Marlboro County
Row 2: Terri Thompson, Child Welfare Services Division, Richland County; Sheila Tindal, Finance Services Division, State Office; and Patricia Murray, Child Support Services Division, Lowcountry Region

DSS Recognizes October Employees of the Month

On October 26th, six DSS professionals will be recognized by Director Michael Leach as Employees of the Month.

Recognized for their hard work and leading with *Competence, Courage, and Compassion* for October are Andrena Rice, Economic Services Division, Greenville County; Brandi Nerud, Adult Advocacy Services Division, State Office; Jennifer Fenters, Legal Services Division, Marlboro County; Terri Thompson, Child Welfare Services Division, Richland County; Sheila Tindal, Finance Services Division, State Office; and Patricia Murray, Child Support Services Division, Lowcountry Region.

The recognition celebration with Director Leach is being held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. Each honoree has the use of a designated parking space for the entire month. They also receive a DSS lapel pin, a gift card donated by A Home for Me to be used to purchase lunch and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations!



Partnering to Make a Difference

By Stephanie Gentry, Oconee County Director

This year Oconee County DSS was presented with the United Way's Partner of the Year Award.

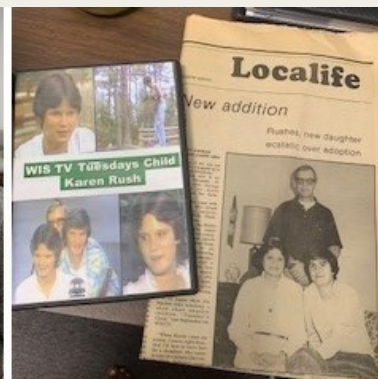
This award recognizes community partners that work alongside United Way in serving our community. Oconee DSS staff help volunteer with Back to School events, the Senior Farmer's Market and direct support to the United Way office.

Thank you so much for all you do!

Personal Connection for Pee Dee DSS Team Member

By Nikita Harrison, Child Welfare Operations Director

Mrs. Karen Rush Knight, Licensing Specialist, Florence, recently shared her story with us as we visited the licensing office in the Pee Dee. Mrs. Knight was one of the first teen youth featured in a recruitment program by DSS titled "Tuesday's Children." She was adopted at age 16 by the Knight family as a teen and is now employed by the agency. As shown in the picture, she has



the news article and TV footage of the campaign. I wanted to share as I feel it shows our teens are adoptable and can have great success stories as Mrs. Knight.



SCPA's Social Worker of the Months of September and October

DSS would like to congratulate Sharon Wegner (left) with our

Greenville County DSS office and Tamiko Hazel (right) with the Berkeley County DSS office. Sharon has been named [South Carolina Foster Parent Association's](#) Social Worker of the Month for September 2021 and Tamiko for October. Congratulations Sharon and Tamiko! Thank you for your outstanding service to children and families!

Partner & Community Spotlights

New Training Space for Front-Line Professionals

On Friday, September 24th, SCDSS was honored to take part in the dedication ceremony of the [Children's Law Center's new training center at the University of South Carolina](#). The project, which was over a decade in the making, will assist in training frontline professionals who work with vulnerable children and families. Among the features is a mock courtroom that can convert into a classroom.



Michael Leach, DSS State Director, was among those who spoke at the dedication. "The center will provide opportunities to practice skills," Director Leach said. "It allows our case managers to acquire critical skills needed to perform their jobs at a high level. Secondly, it builds confidence. Work in child welfare is difficult, it is dangerous. The training site will help to build self-confidence by exposing our professionals to a variety of settings they will encounter while out in the field in a non-threatening manner. This helps to develop poise and self-confidence."

Grant Funding to Help Victims of Violence

Charleston Daily recently ran a news article highlighting grant funds available to help victims of violence. [Carolina Youth Development Center \(CYDC\)](#) was selected by

the South Carolina Attorney General's office to receive more than \$363,000. The grants are administered through the South Carolina Department of Crime Victim Assistance Grants (DCVAG). The department's mission is to enhance the state's capacity to assist crime victims and to provide leadership in the promotion of justice and healing. Through grant funding, victims can receive services including:

- Victim advocacy
- Counseling
- Residential shelter
- Forensic interviews
- Forensic nurse examination and emergency assistance.

You can learn more about the grants [here](#).



**CAROLINA YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT CENTER**



LATE ON RENT AND UTILITIES?

AVAILABLE ASSISTANCE



This project is being supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number ER40027 awarded to the State of South Carolina by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

APPLYING TO SC STAY PLUS IS EASY



View the Application
SC Stay Plus applications open May 5th, 2021 and can be completed online!

If you have questions, please call the SC Stay Plus call center at **803-336-3420**, toll free at **1-800-476-0412**, or email us at scstayplus@schousing.com.

Updated SC Stay Plus Assistance Program

To help thousands of South Carolina residents late on their rent payments to avoid possible evictions, SC Housing has updated its [SC Stay Plus emergency rental and utility assistance program](#). The updates make applications and approvals easier.

The SC Stay Plus program is a \$272 million federally funded program designed to help renters in 39 South Carolina counties stay safely in their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing payments directly to landlords and utility companies.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently extended a federal moratorium on evictions until October 3rd for counties still battling COVID-19 spread-which includes every county in the state.

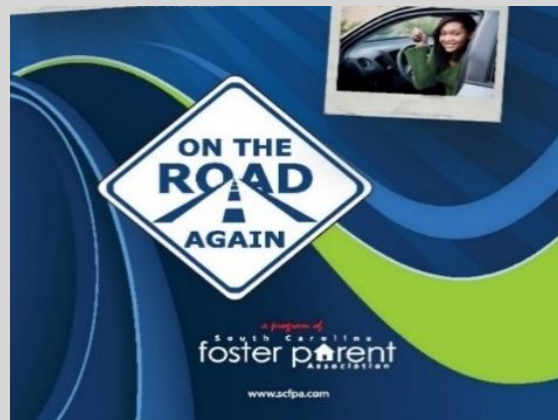
Renters who live in seven counties- Anderson, Berkeley, Charleston, Greenville, Horry, Richland, and Spartanburg- have their own programs to assist residents.

On the Road Again

Do you have a used car or truck that you no longer need, but you do not think you can get much for it? Before you try to sell it or trade it in, why not consider donating it to help the [South Carolina Foster Parent Association](#)?

There is a desperate need for used vehicles and all cars donated to the ["On the Road Again" program](#) go to help deserving foster care youth.

Your donation could make a huge difference in the life of a young person who lacks transportation. They may be trying to get to school or work or need help to gain independence. To find out how you can make a lasting, positive impact, call Brian Marion at 803-665-9225.

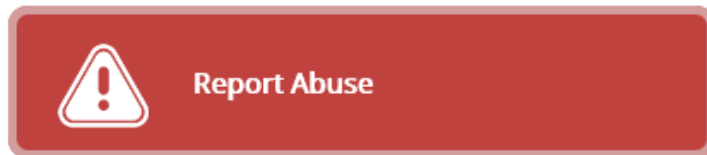


Report abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES

1-888-CARE4US

Click the red "Report Abuse" button to make an online report of suspected abuse and/or neglect, now!



Reporters may remain anonymous or provide contact information to receive follow up on the outcome of their report.

SC Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520
www.DSS.sc.gov



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